

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING**  
**Minutes of May 25, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse (7:09 p.m.), and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, John Helfant (Police Chief), Mark Fournier, Jeff Ott, Shannon Doney, and Carolyn Stevens.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

**IV. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT**

- a. John Helfant, Police Chief.** Chief Helfant reported that the Northfield Police Department (NPD) is doing well at this time. Of the six (6) full-time officers, two (2) remain temporarily deployed in the armed forces so Chief Helfant has been helping to fill work shifts (when needed) in order to maintain 24/7 police coverage. He added the most common complaint recently has been speeding vehicles so he has deployed his officers to observe the areas with the most frequent complaints, such as Northfield Falls. The NPD officers haven't seen a higher level of speeders but he noted the officers can't be everywhere at the same time. Chief Helfant said calls for service seem to be down a bit from last year and he believed this could be attributed to the ongoing pandemic. He does appreciate all the support the NPD has received from the community during these difficult times. Chair Maxwell asked about the status of the NPD vehicle fleet. Chief Helfant said all four (4) cruisers are back on the road now. The 2014 cruiser was out of commission for a couple weeks for repairs but now is back in service. Board member Stevens asked if the NPD has had any luck in recruiting new officers. Chief Helfant said this is a state-wide problem as it is difficult to find qualified applicants. There were two (2) applicants for part-time positions but one wasn't really qualified and the other took a full-time position elsewhere. Chief Helfant said one silver lining is that the NPD has been able to retain its current officers while other agencies, especially the state police, have had real problems with officer retention. Manager Schulz confirmed he has received many calls about speeding vehicles and also a good number about excessive vehicle noise, especially coming from motorcycles. He asked if the NPD could address this concern. Chief Helfant said this can be a very difficult matter for police to pursue as the officer has to be physically present when the allegedly excessive noise occurs, which is unlikely. In addition, state law is very vague regarding at what decibel level does vehicle noise become a prosecutable offense. Chief Helfant said much of this excess noise can be attributed to faulty mufflers, etc. and this is best caught during annual state vehicle inspections. Manager Schulz asked if other Washington County law enforcement agencies have any success dealing with this problem. Chief Helfant didn't think so as this is a very difficult offense to prosecute or even fully investigate. He noted courts have ruled that a search warrant now is needed before officers can chalk tires to obtain evidence of parking violations. It probably would be necessary to obtain a warrant in order to compel the vehicle operator to provide a sampling of the suspected noise offense. Manager Schulz asked Chief Helfant if he had seen Governor Scott's recent statement in regards to the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder. Chief Helfant hasn't seen it yet but he confirmed NPD sustains rigorous equity training to ensure local police treat all those they encounter the same. Chair Maxwell then thanked Chief Helfant for his report tonight and his good work throughout the year.

**V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION**

- a. **Liquor License Renewal: Northfield Country Club.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Outside Consumption Permit: Northfield Country Club.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Miller, to approve the outside consumption permit. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

**VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **May 11, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

**VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #22-21.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-21 in the amount of \$132,134.68. Board member Stevens asked why there were so many property tax refunds on this warrant. Manager Schulz said the final installment of 2020 property taxes were due on Friday, May 14, 2021 and there were a number of people who had paid more than the amount due. In addition, delayed state tax adjustments sometimes resulted in overpayments. Board member Goodrich added that banks sometimes forward excess escrow funds to the municipality so they can be returned to the taxpayer. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

*Board member Morse arrived at this time.*

- b. **Approval of Warrant #22-21A.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-21A in the amount of \$10,471.84. Board member Goodrich noted this payment was related to a FY 2011/2012 RSMS (Road Surface Management System) loan. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Warrant #22-21B.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #22-21B in the amount of \$275,174.22. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- d. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through May 16, 2021.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$94,838.37. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**VIII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **General Obligation Refunding Note (Cox Brook Road Paving).** Manager Schulz said the previous vote taken (Warrant #22-21B) was for paying off a one-year note for this paving project whereas this would authorize a new note for the remaining nine (9) years of a ten (10) year note. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the General Obligation Refunding Note in the amount of \$244,629 at 1.73% interest; approve the Refunding Resolution and Certificate; and approve the Tax Certificate. Noting the interest rate on this loan, Board member Morse asked what interest rate the municipality is receiving on its bank deposits. Manager Schulz is unsure but given the current low interest rates, he believes it would be in the range of about one percent (1%). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Bond Anticipation Note Extension (Union Brook Road Reconstruction).** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members approved this note last year but given the Bond Bank has its own schedule, they are now being asked to extend the note another three (3) months until all funding becomes available. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve extending this Bond Anticipation Note's maturity date from June 25, 2021 to September 25, 2021. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- c. **DRAFT 2021 Memorial Park Pool Schedule and Fees.** Manager Schulz said each year the Select Board members are asked to approve the pool schedule and the various user fees charges. The pool is scheduled to open on Saturday, June 19, 2021 and close on Sunday, August 22, 2021. There will be four (4) separate sessions of swimming lessons. As the pool did not open last year due to the pandemic, the fees will remain unchanged from the last year of operation (2019). Manager Schulz noted that unlike several public pools in the region, Northfield was able to recruit a sufficient number of lifeguard applicants. He also provided credit to Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi and his crew for working so hard to get the pool ready for its opening. Chair Maxwell noted that a resident posting on local social media asked if it were possible to provide discounted fees for active or retired armed service members. Manager Schulz said that would be a decision for the Select Board members. Chair Maxwell asked if Shannon Palone would serve as Pool Director again this year. Manager Schulz confirmed she would. Board member Morse asked if there was any way that COVID-19 recovery funds (see below) could be used to offset some of the pool operating expenses and thus allow a reduction of user fees. Manager Schulz is unsure but added there is great flexibility on how these funds could be used. Approval of the municipal pool schedule and fees was postponed until the next regular meeting (06/08/21) so there can be full discussion of possible military service discounts and potential use of COVID-19 recovery funds.
- d. **COVID-19 Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.** Manager Schulz distributed in the Select Board packets a "Fact Sheet" regarding these recovery funds and how they can be used by local governments. It is estimated Northfield will receive \$670,000 in these funds as the allocation is based on population. The first payment is expected in early June 2021 with the remaining half provided twelve (12) months later. Manager Schulz said additional funds may become available should the amounts allocated for Vermont counties are instead diverted to their member municipalities. This could bring Northfield's share over \$1,000,000 but nothing is certain at this time. Municipalities are required to expend all these funds before the end of the 2026 calendar year. The fact sheet lists the many ways these funds can be used, which include supporting public health expenditures; addressing the negative impact of the pandemic on the local economy; replacing lost municipal revenue; providing premium pay for essential workers; and investing in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. Disallowed uses of these recovery funds include using them to lower local tax rates or supplement existing pension funds. Manager Schulz said it will be a challenge to determine how these recovery funds could be best employed. The first installment will be put into an interest-bearing bank account until these decisions can be made. Public input will be an important part of the decision-making process so a number of public hearings will be held for this purpose. Manager Schulz also has asked municipal department heads for their suggestions on how to best use these funds. Mark Fournier asked if any bank interest earned would have the same use restrictions as the principal amount. Manager Schulz is unsure because rules regarding use of these funds are still being developed. Regarding the guidance he is receiving on these matters, Manager Schulz has read the available literature and already attended VLCT webinars in order to become aware of all the issues. In addition, VLCT has hired a full-time employee whose sole responsibility is to work with member municipalities and answer any of their questions regarding these recovery funds.

## **IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Manager Schulz said this project is nearly completed as the final layer of paving has been done. The contractor next will work on general cleanup of the work site as well as fix the end of driveways so there is a smoother transition to the new pavement. Highway Foreman Trent Tucker is inspecting the road and any problems he identifies will be brought to the contractor's attention. Manager Schulz has travelled the road himself for the same purpose. The final inspection of the work performed will be done in about a week.

Board member Stevens asked if this would include taking core samples of the new pavement to ensure proper thickness has been achieved. Manager Schulz will discuss this with the project engineer.

- b. **South Main Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz said the contractor has sorted out his other work commitments and plans to return to Northfield later this week to complete the project. Manager Schulz will stay on top of this. Mr. Fournier thinks the unpaved sections of sidewalk are very uneven and quite dangerous so the contractor needs to restart work as soon as possible.
- c. **VTrans Grant Award.** Manager Schulz has been informed (unofficially) that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) plans to award Northfield a structures program grant that could be used to address serious problems with the Stony Brook Road Bridge. The grant amount would be about \$175,000 and the Select Board members already have budgeted the local match amount. Nothing is finalized until the confirmation letter has been received. When it has, Manager Schulz will start the process for obtaining proper permits, etc.
- d. **Town Highway Department.** Manager Schulz said the Highway crew have graded all the backroads at least once and some twice. A second grader was rented in order to get the work done faster. This was a budgeted expense. Board member Goodrich and Chair Maxwell thanked the crew for their good work. Board member Stevens asked if the department had a sufficient number of trained graders to operate two (2) machines. Manager Schulz said there are at least three (3) employees trained for this work. One of the graders was out of service for one day due to mechanical problems and not because of any manpower shortage.
- e. **Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS).** Manager Schulz said the new NAS paramedic certification went into effect on April 1, 2021 and has been working out well. NAS now is better able to provide emergency service in the field while also reducing the potential extra expense of outside paramedic intercepts. In addition, due to decreased demand, the once-daily COVID-19 testing the NAS conducts has been reduced to four (4) days per week.
- f. **Zoning Regulations.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission (PC) has begun the process of revising the local zoning regulations in order to have them better conform to the revised Town Plan approved last year. Manager Schulz has been asked to attend the next PC meeting (06/02/21) for his views on what should be included in the revisions. One thing he will stress is the need to provide for stronger enforcement against the accumulation of junk vehicles, trash, etc. on private properties adjacent to public highways. The current regulations are very weak on this so a number of problem areas have been allowed to develop. There will be a challenge to find a fair balance between individual property rights and the public good. Manager Schulz said if any of the Select Board members have any specific concerns of their own, he would be pleased to pass these on to the PC members. Board member Morse would like the Select Board to be pro-active on this rather than just waiting for a completed document to be produced. Manager Schulz said the PC's role is to initiate the revision process and then ask the Select Board members for any comments or suggestions. The Select Board members can provide input at any stage of the process, either individually or collectively. Chair Maxwell suggested the Select Board could create a new subcommittee devoted to this purpose. The subcommittee members could collect suggestions from the other Board members and forward them on to Manager Schulz and/or the PC members. Board member Morse has a number of suggestions already including possible use of municipal rights-of-way to address the problem of junky front yards encroaching on public thoroughfares. Board member Goodrich would like some sense of the changes the PC members are envisioning. Manager Schulz said revisions of such long documents usually involves breaking the work down into separate sections that are completed at different times. Perhaps the new subcommittee could review the completed sections and provide feedback at that time. Manager Schulz will ask the PC members at the meeting about their proposed timeline for this process.

- g. CVRPC Parking & Crosswalk Study RFP.** Manager Schulz included in the packets a request-for-proposals for a study that the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission is overseeing on behalf of Northfield Ridge + River Routes. The study will have two (2) parts: 1) identifying “community supported” parking areas for better access to the Town Forest and 2) developing plans for improved safety at the Northfield Falls crosswalk located on Vermont Route 12. This study will require much local public input, which will include warned public hearings.

**X. BOARD MEMBERS’ COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS.** The Select Board members didn’t bring up any new issues of their own.

**XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Jeff Ott: Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Mr. Ott lives on Bear Farm Road so he has been following this project very closely from the beginning. He has observed the work crew checking the asphalt thickness as it was applied so he has no concerns about that. He is very pleased with the project overall but would like to see the road line striped at some point. Manager Schulz said line striping was not included in the project parameters but he will seek quotes for the work once the project has been fully completed. Mr. Ott asked if any guardrails would be added to the road. Manager Schulz said there were no plans to add guardrails but he will look into this to see if they are needed at some locations. Mr. Ott asked if the dip in the road will be fixed. Manager Schulz said the core samples taken at the location indicated that a permanent fix could be quite expensive. He will look into cost-effective options. He added that this particular section of road is in good shape now but we will need to explore long-term solutions.
- b. Mark Fournier: Union Brook Road Reconstruction Project.** Mr. Fournier lives on Union Brook Road and still has a steep incline from his driveway to the new pavement. He would like this resolved as soon as possible before his vehicle suffers any damage. Manager Schulz has spoken to Mr. Tucker and the contractor about this and other driveways. The project will not be considered complete until all the affected driveways are fixed and put back into their original condition.

**XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss legal and personnel matters with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:27 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:18 p.m. No action was taken.

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager’s Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of June 8, 2021.